

How to get news media to your event

An interview with 2nd Lt. Steven Lord, public affairs officer for Westchester Hudson Composite Squadron (South East Group), who hit a public affairs “home run” in January when TV News12 not only covered a Mission Aircrew School, but promoted how viewers could contact the squadron to join CAP. The story aired for three minutes on News 12 in Westchester.



Steven Lord, 2LT CAP

1) Prepare a News Release and Contact the Media

Getting the news crew to cover the event was a fairly simple process.

First, the local news folks here need TIME to organize a team, so I sent them a press release on the Thursday before the event giving them three days' notice to prepare, and followed up with phone calls. (With the TV station, I called the assignment editor, told him a little about what we were doing, and then faxed him the press release.)

Second, the press release included all pertinent information as to where, when and what we were doing. The release was also short and to the point, and communicated a lot of supporting detail about CAP that the editors could use after the filming to flesh out the content. Also, I targeted a local news channel whose motto is “as local as local news gets”. It has been my experience that the local stations are more

interested in carrying this sort of thing than, say, a Fox affiliate that will bump a piece on CAP training for any good car crash. We were also lucky to get an aviation-minded

reporter who worked traffic for seven years (he probably has more hours in the air than most of us) and a cameraman who knew his stuff.

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2LT Steve Lord encouraged a TV news crew to get a shot that included the “USAF AUX” tail markings during its coverage of a Mission Aircrew School in January. A similar thing happened when TV news interviewed LTC Steve Perta (above) during Operation Cold Snap on Feb. 14.

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2) Meet and Escort the News Crew

I met the news crew when they arrived at South East Group HQ in Westchester, and then we discussed how to structure the feature. I requested that the coverage consist of BOTH classroom shots and views of the aircraft on the ramp. We also went over again the key reasons for the Mission Aircrew School, what it covered, and what CAP was all about. I also gave them information that I knew would fit well into sound bites - like our mission is evolving to include Homeland Security (BIG buzzword with press people), we save on average 100 people per year, we fly on average “X” thousand hours, etc., etc. I also had the ramp coverage include the tail of our plane (with USAF AUX markings & CAP seal) and the cockpit, which I feel are both images that would appeal to viewers.

For the classroom part, we had the crew shoot some scenes of the class in progress, as well as interview the instructor (Capt. Paul Ghiron, squadron commander) and a student in the class who hails originally from the UK. Both interviews were designed to give a sense of mission to what we were doing there - training for SAR and HS missions. We were also able to give them our website URL for inclusion onto their website article, and it has resulted in several requests for more information.

All in all we shot about 20 minutes of film for a three-minute report, so a lot was done and said that was edited out, but I thought the final piece was very good and portrayed CAP in a positive light. In the future, we will be working with News12 on an in-depth look at CAP (hopefully a 30-minute special) in which, assuming approval, we also get the crew into the air.

NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate release

Civil Air Patrol's Southern New York Squadrons conduct Mission Aircrew School

Westchester County, NY — The U.S. Civil Air Patrol – the United States Air Force Auxiliary – will be conducting a Mission Aircrew School on Sunday, 12 Jan 2003. Training will encompass Search and Rescue (SAR) and Disaster Relief (DR) techniques for aircrew based in lower New York State, as well as discuss CAP's growing homeland security role. Approximately 26 Mission Pilots, Observers and Scanners from the Catskill Mountain Group (Rockland, Orange, Sullivan, & Ulster counties), South East Group (Westchester, Putnam and Dutchess Counties) and New York City Group will be participating in the day-long training session.

DATE: Sunday, 12 January 2003

TIME: 09:30 SHARP - Approx 15:30

LOCATION: Civil Air Patrol Southeast Group HQ, Westchester County Airport, Building 1.

INSTRUCTOR: Capt Paul Ghiron.

Among the topics to be covered will be: Mission Planning, Pre-flight Aircraft Inspection, GPS Navigation, Low-Altitude Flying, Weather, Communications, Disaster Relief & Documentation, Radio Direction Finding and Visual Search techniques.

ABOVE: Steve Lord's press release provides a lot of detail yet is simple, to the point, and emphasizes the time, date and location of the event. A second page (not shown) gives an overview of CAP.

3) Opportunity For Groups and Squadrons

A general comment: The media is currently very keen to show “average” people doing something to help with homeland security, SAR, disaster response, etc. - part of the general nervousness out there, I guess.

In that light, I don't think getting this

type of coverage around the state is hard - virtually every NY Wing squadron or group has a local news channel they could work with - but one must “package” CAP to them in that light. The key points to getting coverage seem to be some relation to homeland security, if even a cursory mention of our upcoming role, and some kind of training or operations in progress. Across the state, any SAREX, MAS, GT school or cadet activity would be great venues for controlled, local TV coverage.